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ABSTRACT

One provision of the Ryan Act, a legislative move intended to improve teacher training programs in California, was the requirement that all teacher candidates be examined for competence in both speaking and oral reading. To ascertain how schools of higher education across that state were dealing with this provision, a questionnaire was sent to 38 schools of higher education. Twenty-four schools responded. The questionnaire elicited information about the areas in which candidates were examined; the setting for the examinations; the frequency of exams; the number of students tested at a given time; the department in charge of the exams; compensation for the examiner; alternatives to the exams; and materials used in publicizing, administering, and evaluating the exams. An analysis of the responses revealed that few institutions were meeting, or had knowledge of, the mandated requirements for credential programs and that there has been little guidance in establishing competency levels, with each school developing its own methods of testing the skills deemed important. In addition, speech departments seemed to have little success in controlling the exams. (A list of schools questioned is appended.) (FL)

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Oral Communication Competencies and Teacher Preparation: What's Happening in California

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Several years ago California instituted the Ryan Act, a move legislators at that time thought would revolutionize teacher training in the State. Whereas previously teachers under the Fisher Act had to complete an academic major and minor as well as a fifth year of professional education, secondary teachers would now take a specified number of hours in a subject area and elementary teachers would take a program of "liberal studies." Their teacher training would also be partially complete at graduation and they would be awarded a "partial credential." (With 45 units past graduation a complete credential would be earned.) Several other changes were made--one specifically affecting every speech and education department. Teacher candidates would be examined for competence in both speaking and oral reading.[1]

Mandated in three sections of the "Manual for Developing, Evaluating, and Approving Professional Preparation Programs for Multiple and Single Subject Credentials" speech competency is one of the most spelled-out requirements in the document. The first of the sections dealing with communication states in brief (1.4.4): "No candidate shall be recommended for credentialing unless he has demonstrated competence in reading, writing and speaking English." Further requirements relating to our field are an understanding of (4.1.1): "Communication processes between teacher-pupil, teacher-parent, teacher-colleague, teacher-administrator." And finally section 5.3.1 asks that students "demonstrate fluent oral reading and knowledge of word structure, comprehension, analysis of author's purpose and flexibility."

In California each school of higher education has developed its teacher training program within Ryan Act guidelines in order to gain approval from the Commission for Teacher Preparation and Licensing. It is then the duty of the education departments to hold students to individual program guidelines and make appropriate recommendations to the State to certify candidates have met established standards. This recommendation therefore certifies the teacher candidates' communication competency adopted by Ryan.

The problem of this study is just how do schools across the State establish and test for those competencies mentioned in Ryan. To ascertain this we sent questionnaires to 38 California schools of higher education (24 responded, see Appendix A). The questionnaire, in all cases, was sent to education departments since they are in charge of certifying competence. The cover letter asked that, in cases where other departments might be involved, the questionnaire be forwarded to the appropriate certifying person or group. The questionnaire attempted to deal with a number of problems in certifying competence. The questions were developed as a result of the writers' association with certifying competence at their school. Questions, responses and discussion follow.

[1]Jim Reed is in charge of certifying communication competence for teacher candidates at Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo.

1. Does your teacher education program ask that teacher candidates show competence in oral communication? If your answer is yes, please continue through the questionnaire. If no, then please sign and return the questionnaire.

This question was asked in order to establish whether or not the various institutions were conforming to State guidelines regarding the basic competencies of teacher candidates.

Of the 38 schools, all U.C.'s, CSU's, and 10 private colleges, only 15 answered yes to the question. Nine answered no and returned the questionnaire, with the remaining 14 choosing not to return the questionnaire at all (see Appendix A).

It is most significant to note that from the answers to this first question only 15 institutions are meeting the requirements mandated by state law.

2. How are teacher candidates contacted for your exams?

There are various ways for contact to be made and necessary information given out to the candidates. This question was asked in order to find out how each institution informs students of the test.

Nine of the institutions contact candidates upon the initial application to the program. A few institutions do more by sending out personal notices, printing information in the campus news bulletin, and through announcing in various prerequisite courses. Three institutions did not seem to understand the question and thus made no attempt to answer it.

It would appear that the easiest way to contact the candidates is upon their initial application to the program. However, the additional efforts by a few institutions appear worthwhile and probably beneficial to all in the long run.

3. In what areas are the candidates tested? (Oral reading, public speaking, interpersonal communication, etc.)

This is a vital question, central to our questionnaire, serving to pinpoint the area or areas each institution feels essential to the teacher candidate.

Fourteen of the 15 responding institutions answered this question. Eight of these responded that oral reading was the area tested. The remaining 6, and in some cases the above mentioned 8, would test for classroom communication, public speaking, interpersonal communication and oral interpretation of literature.

The most consistent response made by schools was that of oral reading (8 schools listed this item). Other areas examined, though not to the same degree, were classroom communication, public speaking, interpersonal communication and oral interpretation.

The most obvious reason schools consider testing oral reading would seem to be the speed in which such tests can be given and judgments rendered. After all, such a test fills the State mandate. This test appears quite inadequate since students' abilities to research, logically develop and carefully present an idea are really not brought into specific question.

4. What entails the oral communication exam and which performance skills do you pay specific attention to?

Having found out the area of oral communication each institution felt was vital, we designed this question to find out not only how they tested for competency in that area, but what they felt were the criteria for competency.

For 8 institutions the examination was an oral reading to an instructor. For these 8 as well as 2 other institutions a short speech, usually done through the guise of an interview, was also part of the exam. Only 1 other institution answered this question and they replied that the exam was only communication with students in a classroom situation.

In general the 11 institutions looked for the same skills by which to judge the candidates' competencies. The specific skills looked for were pronunciation, articulation, syntax, and grammar, and a lively intonation pattern. One institution also looked for candidates' ability to organize and express ideas in a clear manner.

It can be seen that while the specific skills tested for are fairly consistent among institutions, examinations which students face are quite varied. The exams do not appear to challenge students' skills to the point where they may be adequately judged in either breadth or width. Nor do they appear to be adequately testing for areas in which the candidates will be communicating.

5. What is the setting for the exam?

The setting plays a very important role in the process of examining teacher candidates. On the job the candidate will be faced with a number of different settings; the one most often employed, of course, will be that of the classroom. We asked this question to find out what settings the institutions are placing candidates in when conducting the exams.

Nine of the 11 answering this question used a classroom type setting. One of these institutions used either a faculty office or a conference room in addition to the classroom. Of the remaining 2 institutions, one used just faculty offices and the other institution used a therapy room.

It should be noted that while the candidate will be in various settings, the setting where he will spend the most of his time is in the classroom. It is encouraging that the major portion of those who answered employ the classroom situation. Obviously this testing situation remains the least costly. Classroom performance together with the office interview would seem to be approaching more the ideal.

6. How often are the exams given?

This question was asked in order to determine the frequency of the exams or how available the tests are for students to take. This question also directly relates to the number of students at each exam and, more importantly, the change in setting due to increase or decrease of candidates at each exam.

Seven schools answered this question and no more than two agreed in their response. Two answered once per semester and one replied, as often as needed. In between these two answers fell several times per year, 4 times a year (once each quarter), 3 times per week (2 hrs., 2 hrs., 1 hr.) and finally twice per week (1½ hrs., 1½ hrs.).

The variety of answers would appear to point to a definite change in the setting. In the case of the more frequent exams, unless there are a large number of candidates preparing for the credential program, the sheer numbers, or lack of, would take away from a realistic classroom setting. The smaller numbers would necessitate either a very small group setting or even a one on one setting. Unless a large number of professors were released, schools giving the test several times a year would provide a rather unrealistic large lecture hall setting.

7. How many students are tested at a given time?

This question follows directly from question #6 and is helpful in finding out the setting of the exam. Eight of the 15 institutions answered that they examined one candidate at a time. Two institutions would test in numbers up to 14. One institution would examine in numbers of 1 to 3 per exam. The remaining 4 institutions didn't answer the question.

These answers help illustrate the point of the previous question. Whether by choice, or forced by the low numbers of candidates, the majority of the institutions are examining the candidates on a one to one basis. (Since most schools

would certify several hundred candidates per year, numbers would not seem to be the reason.) This unfortunately does not place the examination in a realistic situation where candidates' ability to communicate orally in front of a group can be judged.

8. What department is in charge of the exams and who administers them?

We developed this question in order to determine who is in charge of making judgments about oral competence, to see if different departments would look for similar competencies and, more interestingly, to see whether similar departments, from different institutions, would develop similar exams.

All 15 institutions answered this question. Seven institutions said that their school of education ran the exams. The speech department (theatre and rhetoric, in one case) ran the exams for the other 7. One institution had its exams administered by the speech department, but with one major difference--they were administered by students under supervision.

The survey was evenly divided in the answers received although it came as no surprise that the departments were limited to education and speech. There was, however, no apparent similarities between the exams and the departments. Speech departments differed from each other to the same degree as education and speech.

9. Is release time or some other form of compensation given the examiner?

Such a question would seem to provide some insight into just how important each institution considered the exam as well as just how it might be treated by the examiner.

Of the 15 institutions, 8 replied no to the question. Four did not answer the question, and one said the question was not applicable to their particular situation. Only 2 institutions replied yes to the question. One of these two received their time through ASHA hours.

These answers bring up a potential danger spot. It appears that for all but 2 of the institutions nothing is being done for the examiner's time and effort. There is no reward or incentive to perform in a concerned manner, nor is there any particular reason for commitment to the exams--all of which bring the examination process into question.

10. Do courses exist which a student may take in place of the exams? If so, what are they?

This question was asked to find out if the institutions could justify competency by means other than the

exams. Two of the 15 institutions chose not to answer the question. Three others answered no, that there were no existing courses which could be taken in place of the exams. The remaining 10 institutions replied yes and, for 7 of these 10, a basic speech course served in place of the exams. Two of the 7 institutions also listed courses in voice and phonetics, oral interpretation, and development of performance skills in speech and language, in addition to the basic speech course. The development of performance skills was also an answer for one of the 3 remaining institutions. One institution asked only for a special waiver in place of the exam. The final institution answered that the question was not applicable to their situation.

For most of the institutions a basic speech course is all that is necessary to fulfill a candidate's competency requirement. The question arises regarding whether or not the basic speech courses, or for that matter any of the courses, are developing skills or examining candidates competencies in light of their career objective. Although the question was not asked, it would seem conceivable that a passing grade might be given a student who lacks necessary classroom communication skills.

11. <u>What statements in the Ryan Act justify your screening teacher candidates' oral skills?</u>

This question was asked to see if institutions did, in fact know the legal justifications for their exams. Six of the 15 institutions cited section 1.4.4, which states, "No candidate shall be recommended for credentialing unless he has demonstrated competence in reading, writing, and SPEAKING English." Two of these 6 institutions, along with one other cited section 5.3.1, which states, "Demonstrate fluent oral reading and his knowledge of word structure, comprehension, analysis of authors' purpose, and flexibility." In addition one institution, which cited both sections 1.4.4 and 5.3.1, also cited section 4.1.1, "Provision for the development of understandings and competencies, including but not limited to: Communication processes between teacher-pupil, teacher-parent, teacher-colleague, teacher-community, teacher-administrator." One institution could only answer; "The requirement for verifying oral competence." Three institutions didn't know it and gave indication that they were not really concerned with Ryan Act guidelines. The remaining 4 institutions did not answer the question.

The results of this question point to the surprising fact that of 15 institutions, only 7 could cite specific sections which justify their exams. One other could cite

only in general terms, while the remaining 7 neither cited nor gave any indication that they cared to know the legal justification of their programs.

12. Has your teacher education program developed guidelines beyond those in the Ryan Act? If so, what are they?

Since individual schools develop their education programs within the Ryan guidelines and, in doing so, make a number of modifications, we were looking to see if they had made any special qualifications for assessing teacher oral competency.

Of the 15 institutions, 9 answered no to the question. Four did not answer the question and only 2 answered that they had developed their guidelines beyond the requirements found in the Ryan Act.

This question, as with some of the previous questions, yielded interesting results. Only 2 of the 15 institutions said they have developed guidelines beyond those in the Ryan Act and in the previous question (#11), one indicated that although they didn't know the specific Ryan guidelines had gone beyond them.

13. Please include any materials which you use in publicizing, administering, and evaluating the exams.

This request was written with the hopes of getting additional information regarding the different programs. Only 5 of the 15 schools responded by sending additional information. One other institution indicated in a previous question that it had printed material, but never sent any.

The above responses to the questionnaire would suggest a multitude of conclusions. Foremost in our minds is the fact that few institutions in California are meeting, or have knowledge of, mandated requirements for credential programs. It was most interesting to discover the number of schools unaware of the sections in Ryan which refer to oral competency. There has indeed been little guidance in establishing competency levels, leaving each school to develop its own methods of testing those skills deemed important.

We were surprised to see speech departments taking a back seat in the testing process. It would seem that they are having little success in becoming involved in controlling these tests, let alone generating financial support from

the administration. As one colleague recently stated, "We have a great deal to learn from the Greeks."

One would think our courses could serve not only in the development but in the assessment of these skills, (Such contact would seem more beneficial than brief one to one encounters held in education interviews.) In instances where future teachers do not take our courses as part of their degree program, speech departments should either help the education department give the exam--or simply seek power to control their administration.

Is this an impossible task? We would not think so at this point. In our institution, our department entirely controls certification. Moreover, we have justified and received release time for the exams, administering them twice each week throughout the term. For the last five years no student has moved into a student teaching assignment without our department certifying his or her abilities in speaking and oral reading. It is our hope other speech departments will become involved in this process. After examining the education codes in each of your states, you will find, we are sure, justification for performing a more controlling role in this critically important area of teacher training.

APPENDIX A
SCHOOLS QUESTIONED

		Questionnaires Returned
CSU,	Chico	Yes
	Dominguez Hills	Yes
	Fresno	Yes
	Fullerton	Yes
	Hayward	Yes
	Long Beach	No
	Los Angeles	Yes
	Northridge	No
	Sacramento	Yes
	Pomona	No
	San Luis Obispo	Yes
	Bakersfield	Yes
	San Bernardino	No
	Sonoma	No
	Stanislaus	No
	Humboldt	Yes
	San Francisco	Yes
	San Diego	Yes
	San Jose	No
U.C.,	Berkeley	Yes
	Davis	Yes
	Irvine	Yes
	Los Angeles	Yes
	Riverside	No
	Santa Barbara	Yes
	Santa Cruz	No
	San Diego	Yes
	San Francisco	No
Private,		
	Biola College	Yes
	LaVerne College	Yes
	Loyola Marymount	No
	Occidental College	Yes
	Pepperdine University	No
	Point Loma	Yes
	Santa Clara University	Yes
	University of Pacific	Yes
	University of Southern California	No
	Westmont College	No